

P.S. It has all ended rather sadly. Navy cancelled
contact. Now twiddling my thumbs, heart-sick & sorry
about the whole thing. Any suggestions as to a job ?? J.
Feb. 14, 1965

Dear Bill and Mary,

Thank you for your letter, and for writing to Miss Du Hue Lan. The latter was delighted to get your invitation, and is quite excited at the prospect of meeting you all. I did not, incidentally, intend that you invite her to stay for any protracted period of time, realizing full well the limitations imposed upon you by time, space, and economics. It is very good of you to want to help. But a word to the wise: you might discourage that Chinese bloke. The Vietnamese have a natural antipathy to the Chinese; in other words, they dislike and distrust one another. If one could generalize, one might say that of the two, the Chinese are by far the better businessmen, generally speaking, harder-working, more industrious, and more trustworthy. The Vietnamese, on the other hand, are infinitely more intelligent (in the esoteric sense of the word) and infinitely more sensitive. Their women have a delicate, sylph-like beauty and gracefulness which Chinese women could never hope to emulate. My counsel would be to let her find herself, and provide her with the answers to questions she will inevitably ask about the city and the people she will meet while staying with you.

You know, I think, in what high regard I hold you, a regard which eighteen months of silence have not altered. What you have done for others, myself included, cannot be estimated, nor can the compassion that has flowed from your hearts over those in trouble. I would be the last to point an accusing finger at you and the first to jump to your defense. I do not know if there are others like you in the world; I can only say that I have not met them, if indeed they exist. We have disagreed, in the past, about some things, but we have continued to respect each other's point of view. And though I know I am only one of thousands whom you have befriended, and therefore deserving of no special place in your affections, if someone were to ask me why I should return to New York, I could only give one reason: to see the Kochiyamas. Lord knows, nothing else would drag me back....

This said, it was with the deepest shock and dismay that I read the pamphlet you enclosed with your letter. I can truthfully say that I did not sleep that night. I do not know which hurts me more: the knowledge that many presumably responsible people can follow this line, or that you yourselves subscribe to these beliefs.

I, with certain of my Vietnamese friends (I would be ^{be}ashamed to show it to others) have read and re-read the "Appeal to the Conscience of America". It is a pathetic little catalog of distortions, half-truths, and fiction - with however sufficient facts to give it at least a semblance of credibility. I do not know who wrote it, but from the "Declaration of Conscience", let me quote the opening lines:

"Because the use of the military resources of the United States in Viet Nam and elsewhere suppresses the aspirations of the people for political independence and economic freedom."

This is, although you may not recognize it, exactly the same line that Hanoi, Moscow and Peking have been peddling. It might have been taken verbatim from one of the many broadcasts I have listened in to in recent months. Draw your own conclusions; I have already drawn mine.

I shall leave to my Vietnamese friends the task of rebuttal, and you may be sure that one may be forthcoming before very long. Meantime, let me say

a few things in defense of our policy here; in defense, too, of our lads in the field and their Vietnamese comrades-in-arms who daily lay down their lives in the hope - and to some it must sometimes seem a forlorn one - that their country will remain free and that those who survive them will one day be able to till their fields in peace. A peace without fear.

My dear friends, your pamphlet speaks of the things some soldiers of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam have done to civilians, and how, oftentimes, prisoners are killed after interrogation. But have you ever seen - as I have - what the Viet Cong do to people whom they cannot coerce into supporting them? Do you know how they treat their prisoners - what special treatment they reserve for the Rangers, the paratroopers, and the Marine Commandos who are unfortunate enough to fall into their hands? (Two Marine officers died by their own hand at Binh Gia in January. Wounded and out of ammunition, they saved the last bullet for themselves, rather than be captured by the V.C.; I was to have had them up for a test the following week, but by then they were dead.) A few weeks ago, the V.C. captured a provincial town. The district chief was taken prisoner, together with his wife. As I recall, she was pregnant. The chief was subjected to public humiliation, torture, mutilation, and finally decapitated. His wife was merely disembowelled. Have you heard, I wonder, how these gentlemen behead village elders not sympathetic to their cause, and then send the severed head back to the man's family, in a basket or in a conical hat? Have your informants - I have no idea who they are, but I would recommend that they spend a few months here - ever seen the Viet Cong driving peasants before them, as a human shield against the bullets of their adversaries? Have you seen buses blown up by a land-mine and women and children indiscriminately slaughtered, simply because the bus-driver would not, or could not, meet the taxes levied by the Communists? Have you spoken with any members of the Vietnamese armed forces, to discover what they thought, or talked to any of our own boys out there in the field, as I have? Have you talked with even one of the two million Vietnamese Roman Catholics who chose the blighted freedom of the Diem regime to the regimented tyranny of the North? Have you ever conversed, as I have, with any of the members of the International Control Commission who divide their time between Saigon and Hanoi, and been told how rigid is the control over the population there? (A N. Vietnamese girl, no matter what her feelings, who ever dared to even greet an ICC representative - even a Polish one - would simply disappear that day or the next.) Did you ever speak to any Vietnamese whose loved ones were murdered by the Viet Cong, and see how they felt about the American presence here? I recall two of my former students, one from North, the other from South Viet Nam. The one from the North had volunteered for a particularly hazardous assignment: training as a frogman & UDT (underwater demolition) expert. "Why?" I wanted to know. "To pay a debt!" the answer rang out. I found out later, from a third party, that the V.C. had beheaded his father. The laddie from the South was a sonarman. In a conversation exercise with three other students around this table, I asked him: "Why did you join the Navy?" He answered simply: "We must fight for our country." Suddenly, his eyes clouded with tears. He spoke again, this time with an effort. "They killed my brother.....it is my duty...." A lump rose in my throat.

"Now that we know the facts," says the blurb, "we have no honorable choice but to insist on an immediate withdrawal of American troops and an end to all military aid to the Saigon government". What facts? To state that we have "sprayed poison from the air to destroy crops and livestock" is not to state a fact, but deliberately distort one. Defoliation of the Ho Chi Minh trail (6 from Laos into S. Viet Nam) was attempted, with (I understand) indifferent success. This has been a major supply line, in terms of arms, ammunition, and men, for the North into South Viet Nam. No effort was made to destroy cattle or crops of an already starving peasantry.

We are told, furthermore: ".....Senator Wayne Morse (Oregon) had made the issues clear....." But Senator Morse makes nothing clear at all, except that he has not the slightest idea of what is happening here. It would be very interesting, not to say enlightening, to know where he gets the substance for his assurance that "there are no Chinese soldiers in Viet Nam....the only foreign troops are American." Out of his head, no doubt. The facts are, unfortunately, quite at variance with his statement. The Chinese are all over Cambodia; they permeate the army and the civil service, their cadres are everywhere. In one rather well-known battle here of a few weeks back, in which the Viet Cong were the losers, the defense of the V.C. positions fell to Chinese officers, whose accents were clearly heard above the turmoil of battle. In general, they are well protected. When a Chinese is killed or badly wounded, and the circumstances do not permit his removal, the head is cut off (to prevent identification) and the torso left behind.

Statements like Walter Lippmann's (another political weather-cock who does his best to mold US foreign policy in S.E. Asia to his own particular ideas, some of which are curious, to say the least) are misleading in the extreme! "The truth is that the Saigon government has the allegiance of probably no more than 30 per cent of the people." Perhaps so. But the implication that the other 70 per cent are for the Viet Cong is quite erroneous. The Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao number perhaps two million. They are not particularly for the government, but they entertain a savage hatred for the Viet Cong. Their enclaves are free of V.C. subversion, and woe betide any V.C. who falls into their hands. If only 30 per cent of the population are for the government, the Viet Cong might have the allegiance of 10 per cent. What about the Buddhists? Say what you will about their political propensities, certain of which I deplore, one must admit that the war against Communist subversion couldn't possibly go on if they were for the other side. Eighty per cent of the people are, after all, of the Buddhist faith.

Continued Feb. 28. I see little point in wasting my breath, or at least my epistolary energies, on a further refutation of the distortions which make up your pamphlet, except to say that the "Peace With Honor" it proposes is not a peace with honor at all, but a truce of sorts, a temporary respite from attack, a breathing space of a year or two, purchased at a terrible cost. And I'm not speaking here of the complete and absolute collapse of our prestige in Asia, bad enough in itself. I'm speaking of the millions of people....Montagnards, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Buddhist cadres, to say nothing of 400,000 men in the armed forces, who would be the victims of the agreement which you recommend. Don't we have a responsibility to them? To our friends the Thais and the Laotians? The trouble is with you, you have not been here, have not lived with the people, witnessed how the Communists operate.... talked with those whose families were massacred by the V.C. I have been here now for eighteen months, and know something about the area.

May I give you a piece of gratuitous advice? Pay attention to some of those "Peace" groups with which you have become affiliated; they may be nothing more than Communist fronts. There is plenty of evidence of this in your pamphlet. Such organizations exploit the gullible and attract the credulous. Wake up, Bill and Mary, before it's too late. I'm not a Goldwater fan, and I deplore the political opportunism of Nixon and McCarthy, but I am for what America is doing here. We stopped them in Korea. We must stop them again in Viet Nam.

If the North continues to attack, as they are attacking now, we must proceed to a systematic destruction, by massive air strikes, of their economic and military potential.

I am in serious trouble as I write this; and my own days in Viet Nam - although I hope not - may be numbered. In October, a Vietnamese friend and myself undertook the writing of a general program which, if implemented, would have led (we felt) to a Communist defeat in Viet Nam. The report ran to 54 pages of typewritten script, and copies were sent to all US govt. agencies in Saigon and Washington. The ideas incorporated in the program were mostly my friend's, while on my part, the work was one of translation and transliteration. Anyhow, the commanding officer of the Navy Group here, a Capt. Hardcastle, felt that by signing my name to the report I had violated the terms of my contract, and (I heard unofficially) a cable had gone out to BUreau of Naval Personnel in Washington, D.C., asking for my recall. However, representations were made to the Embassy here, the First Secretary (and chief of the Political Section) is involved in it, Taylor has apparently been consulted, and things will probably be brought to a head in a day or two. A copy of the Program, incidentally, went out in October to Senator Inouye (who didn't acknowledge receipt of it, though his office did); and whether or not I am retained here, I plan to keep him informed, for I have been put in recent weeks under the most grievous form of pressure, including interrogation by the Office of Naval Intelligence.

Termination wouldn't mean a return to the U.S.A., as I should elect to stay in the area. Eighteen months here have given me quite a reasonable degree of solvency, the climate suits me, and job opportunities are not lacking. I have not the slightest desire to resume the kind of life I left behind when I left the States, and even if Viet Nam were to be cleared entirely of U.S. civilians (more than a remote possibility) I would probably move on to Thailand and take it from there. Life is infinitely better here, infinitely more interesting and challenging. Unless I can help it, you won't see me back there for some time to come.

News of your friend Malcolm X's death came as quite a shock. As my father said, "He advocated violence.....and he died violently." Sometimes I think that the civilization we claim to possess is nothing more than a veneer, covering an immense reservoir of pent-up frustration and seething bitterness. A very thin veneer, I might add.

Well, I must not ramble on; there is plenty of work to be done. I trust that you are all well meantime, and that the kids are in good fettle and acquitting themselves nobly at school. I should, of course, be glad to see Pierre Conhagen. What is he doing out here? Should he come to Saigon for a visit, tell him he will be most welcome here at my apartment. It is modest, but very pleasant and comfortable, and putting him up would be no problem. My cook-housekeeper's cuisine is delectable and varied; she has considerable virtuosity where Chinese, Vietnamese, and French meals are concerned. Incidentally, I am quite annoyed that you didn't tell me Hal Gold was on his way to Japan. He must certainly have touched at Saigon en route, and I would have dearly liked to have seen him. On his way back, or whatever, ask him to stop over. My address is: Apartment 42, Building Ky-Dong, 13/C Ky-Dong, Saigon.

Lan is having difficulty getting a visa. I wonder if it would be possible for you to write her a short note, for the record, saying that you understand she is coming to the U.S., and explaining that you will be glad to see her on her arrival, and put her up while she is in New York. Make no mention of studies, jobs, etc. Just a few lines in this vein, which she can submit to the travel agency, would greatly facilitate the granting of a visa.

All for now. Once again, don't let yourselves be bamboozled on Viet Nam. The pamphlet you sent is beneath contempt, but fortunately, public support of such erroneous views surely cannot be great.

Best boyon all, George